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Information Needs and Information Seeking Behaviour of Agricultural Research Fraternity of West Bengal, India: An Evaluative Study

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Abstract

The present study was undertaken with a view to know the information needs and information seeking behaviour of agricultural research fraternity of Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (UBKV), Pundibari, Cooch Behar, West Bengal (India), which comprises of teachers, scientists and extension specialists. The study employed the survey method with the help of self designed questionnaire. The findings reveal that 76.40% of the respondents visited the library for issue/return of books, while 59.55% respondents visited the library for accessing electronic information resources. Furthermore, 69.66% of the respondents were seeking their desired information from the library for research work, while 55% respondents seeking information specially for writing articles. Some of the problems have also been identified during the study, which restrict the respondents to get their desired information such as 73% of the respondents were facing the problem of 'lack of time due to routine teaching, research and administrative load' and 48.31% respondents reported that 'lack of awareness about the library resources and services' is the major barrier for them for seeking desired information. Based on the results, the researchers have also made some suggestions so that informational demands of the respondents can be fulfilled at their satisfaction level.

Keywords: Information seeking behavior, Usage analysis, User behavior, Agricultural scientists, Information sources, e-Resources, West Bengal, India.

1. Introduction

From the generations, every human being seeks information to satisfy their various types of needs. It is human nature that he/she always searches different ways to resolve the problems and

try to satisfy them. “Information seeking is thus a natural and necessary mechanism of human existence” (Marchionini, 1995). Information actually may be termed as the product of human brain and it may be exists in abstract or in concrete form. “When an individual begins to think, a variety of images and sensations flash across his mind. This makes some information to accumulate in his mind and his memory retains some piece of knowledge. The human need for information is boundless and endless. People need information for different purposes and objectives. They need information for making decisions, career development, conducting research, gaining more knowledge, confirming or refuting issues, and the list goes on. Thus, satisfying information needs plays a vital role in shaping human thinking, attitudes, behaviours, communications, and teaching process” (Das and Mandal, 2021).

In another words, “information seeking behavior is defined as an individual way and manner of gathering and searching for personal use, knowledge updating and development seeking behavior as those activities a person may need for information searching for such information in any way and using or restoring that information. Mainly, user studies have been conducted to know the information seeking behavior of individuals or groups so that an organization can know whether their users are satisfied with the services provided to them or not, and if any lacunae found based on feedback received from the users’, than improvement in resources and services can be done up to the utmost satisfaction”.

Information has become the basic requirement for present human being. The importance of information for general academic as well as agricultural research fraternity plays a major role in agricultural educational and research institutions particularly in Indian scenario. In this changing environment due to wide effect of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), information seeking has become a practice for highly talented agricultural research fraternity. In order to get more update information, a library is an information hub where all types of information available in print and electronic form can be procured from various sources for different utilization by its users’ community.

Therefore, a study has been planned to evaluate the information needs and seeking behaviour of agricultural research fraternity of West Bengal state of India with special reference to North Bengal region. In North Bengal region, the Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (UBKV) at Pundibari, Cooch Behar is the only agricultural university, which plays an important

role in imparting agricultural education as well as caters to the needs of the farmers' community of the region.

2. Information seeking behaviour

To understand the concept, some of the notable definitions have been quoted as given below:

Girija Kumar (1990) defines that “information seeking behaviour is mainly concerned with, who needs, what kind of information, and for what reasons, and how information is found, evaluated and used, and how their needs can be identified and satisfied”. On the other hand, Fairer-Wessels (1990) elaborate information seeking behaviour as “the way people search for and utilize information. Information seeking behaviour is how people use information in their work environment. The need of information seeking behaviour arises due to information need of the information seeker, who in order to satisfy it, makes demands upon formal or informal information sources or services, resulting in either success or failure”. Wilson (2000) defines that “information seeking behaviour is the purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. In the course of seeking the individual may interact with manual information system or with computer based system”.

Therefore, in simple words, information seeking behaviour can be described as an individual's way and manner of gathering and sourcing for information for personal use, knowledge updating and development.

3. Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya, Pundibari, Cooch Behar (W.B.)- A brief sketch

“The state Government of West Bengal initially established an off campus of the Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya at Pundibari in Cooch Behar district in 1979 to cater to the need of peoples of the northern part of West Bengal and imparting higher education in emerging areas of modern agricultural sciences and technology, which comprises eight districts. Later on, the Government of West Bengal upgraded the North Bengal Campus into full-fledged Agricultural University by the name of Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya in 2001 by the West Bengal Act XX of 2000.” (UBKV, 2021).

4. Review of related literature

To understand the information needs and information seeking behavior of different kind of users as well as agricultural research fraternity, some of the past studies have been reviewed which are given as below:

Chanda (2021) conducted a study on information need and information seeking behaviour of college students in Guwahati Metropolitan area and revealed that Google search engine was the highly preferred source of seeking information, followed by teachers, library staffs, and online databases, whereas, preparing assignment, notes and preparation of competitive examinations was the main purpose of seeking information. In an another study, conducted by Raising, Gaddimani and Yadav (2021) to know the information need and information-seeking behaviour of Tangkhul Naga Community in India and found that “print media and Internet were the most popular source for acquiring desired information through the outside world; however, the responded community faces many problems and challenges while seeking information such as cost of access to information, a library without essential collections, outdated nature of books, language barriers, scattered literature, and limited library hours, *etc*”. While conducting the study to know the information seeking behaviour of faculty in post-graduate colleges of District Jalandhar (Punjab), Amandeep Kaur (2020) explored that 77.78% faculty members seek information for covering their class syllabus, followed by keep up to date their information (43.92%), to increase their general knowledge (32.28%), and to write a article (23.28%); however, 83.60% faculty members not use library resources and services due to lack of time, followed by lack of latest information about resources (37.04%), lack of knowledge of how to use library resources and services (6.35%), and do not know how to use OPAC/ Web OPAC (3.17%). Das and Roy (2020) conducted a study of information needs and information seeking behaviour of the Gram Panchayat members of Burdwan-I Development Block of West Bengal state of India and revealed that most of the Gram Panchayat members were frequently access the information from Television and Mobile Phone, and least number of members were used Radio as an information resource in this recent era, whereas, language problem and hesitation or shyness to speak with higher officials, resource persons of trainings, *etc.*, were the main problems to seek desired information for majority of the Gram Panchayat members.

A study was conducted by Horsfall, Orubebe and NSIRIM (2020) to know the information needs and seeking behavior of library and information science students of Rivers State University in digital age and noticed that information needs of students were academics, ICT and Internet related, while examination and assignment were the main motivating factors and for that, users consulted lectures and lecture notes, personal improvement and decision making. To investigate the information seeking behavior of research scholars of Vidyasagar

University, West Bengal, Banerjee (2019) found that to remain up-to-date and preparing researches were the two main purposes of seeking information by the researchers, followed by writing article, solving the problems, and general awareness, whereas, language barrier was the main reason for lesser use of e-resources. In Sri Lanka, at University of Peradeniya, Gunasekera and Balasubramani (2019) tried to explore the electronic information seeking behavior of postgraduate students and found that “most of the respondents used electronic resources available in the library, and websites and online catalogs were the most preferred electronic resources, while most of the respondents used e-resources for their research works and writing assignments and the average time spent for using e-resources was one to two hours per week”. Bhanu Partap (2016) conducted a study of information needs and seeking behaviour of research fraternity of Lala Lajpat Rai University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Hisar (India) and noticed that “85% users were aware about the information resources available in the library, and more than 80% research scholars were given preference to electronic-resources (e-resources) for getting their desired information, while Cent percent research scholars were using Internet facilities and e-resources, and moreover 60% users were satisfied with the performance of library staff”. In an another study, to know the information seeking behavior and satisfaction of library users in digital era at Chhaju Ram Memorial Jat College, Hisar, Bhanu Partap (2016) explored that “majority (85.20%) of the library users use the library just to consult or borrow the study material, while about 44% of the respondents were unaware about the use of updated information technology and its applications; however about 51% respondents were partially satisfied with the library services and facilities”. While studying the information needs and information seeking behavior among the students of Ondo State University of Science and Technology, Okitipupa, Oyadeyi (2014) revealed that “course work and assignment, examination and test, general reading, seminars and workshops were the main factors that influence students’ information seeking behavior, whereas, Internet, lecture notes, text books and handouts were the preferred and most used information sources”.

5. Statement of the problem

The problem identified for this study is information needs and information seeking behavior of agricultural research fraternity of West Bengal state of India with special reference to the Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya, Pundibari, Cooch Behar, which is located in North Bengal region.

Therefore, this study intends to explore the problems of information needs and information seeking behaviour of agricultural research fraternity of West Bengal state of India.

6. Objectives of the study

The prime objective of the present study is to analyze the information needs and information seeking behavior of agricultural research fraternity of West Bengal state of India. However, the allied objectives of the study are as follows:

- To know the information needs of agricultural research fraternity
- To investigate the trend in using library services and facilities among the agricultural research fraternity
- To know the information gathering behavior of agricultural research fraternity
- To ascertain the purpose of information gathering
- To identify the various sources of information accessed by the agricultural research fraternity
- To find out the main sources of information, the agricultural research fraternity usually refer to, in order to fulfill their information needs
- To identify the constraints faced by these users in using/searching information in libraries
- To suggest some remedy which may help the agricultural research fraternity of agricultural universities of West Bengal state of India to use the library in an efficient and effective way

7. Scope and limitation of the study

The present study is proposed to explore the information needs and information seeking behaviour of agricultural research fraternity of West Bengal state of India with special reference to the Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (UBKV), Pundibari, Cooch Behar, therefore, the present study is limited to the agricultural research fraternity of UBKV only.

8. Research methodology

The present study is empirical in nature and based on the random sampling method, followed by survey using questionnaire as a tool of data collection. The required data for the present study were collected from the research fraternity, which includes teachers, scientists and extension specialists of Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (UBKV), Pundibari, Cooch Behar, West Bengal (India). Required data for the present study were collected in the month of March-April, 2021. A total of one hundred questionnaires were distributed randomly in the premises of UBKV

as well as by e-mail among the agricultural research fraternity. Out of total 100 distributed questionnaires, 89 questionnaires were received back and found valid for final analysis, which representing the overall response rate @89 per cent. After collecting the data, the data were presented in the tabular form and analyzed statistically by using simple frequency count and simple percentage analysis to get the results as per the framed objectives for the present study.

9. Data analysis and interpretation

The data have been presented, compared and analysed in the following tables:

Table 1: Gender-wise distribution of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	53	59.55
Female	36	40.45
Total	89	100

The Table 1 shows the gender-wise distribution of agricultural research fraternity of Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (UBKV), Pundibari, Cooch Behar, West Bengal (India) who were participated in the survey. It is revealed from the data that out of total 89 respondents, 59.55% were male and 40.45% were female respondents participated positively in the survey study and offered their valuable responses towards each and every question whatever asked in the questionnaire.

Table 2: Frequency of library visit

Visit frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Everyday	11	12.36
Weekly	18	20.22
Fortnightly	22	24.72
Monthly	29	32.58
Rarely	09	10.12
Total	89	100

The data given in Table 2 highlights the frequency of library visit and it is revealed that 32.58% of the respondents visited the library once in a month, while 24.72% respondents visited the library once in a fortnight. Another side, 20.22% of the respondents visited the library once in a week, followed by everyday (12.36%). Interestingly, it was also found during the study that 10.12% of the respondents were rarely visited the library to get their desired information and further they responded that they used the library services whenever they feel it required at utmost level.

Table 3: Time spent per week in the library

Visit frequency	Frequency	Percentage
<1 hour	42	47.20
1-2 hours	21	23.60
2-3 hours	15	16.85
3-5 hours	09	10.11
>5 hours	02	02.24
Total	89	100

The Table 3 represents the time spent per week in the library premises by the agricultural research fraternity of UBKV. It is revealed from the data given in above table that 47.20% of the respondents spent less than one hour of their precious time in the library premises for various purposes, while 23.60% respondents spent 1-2 hours. On the other hand, 16.85% of the respondents spent 2-3 hours, followed by 3-5 hours (10.11%) and more than five hours (02.24%) respectively. After the analysis, it was noticed that maximum respondents spent less than two hours in the library premises for fulfillment of their informational demands due to very busy schedule of them in regular class teaching as well as field work.

Table 4: Purpose of library visit

Purpose*	Frequency (n= 89)	Percentage
Issue/Return books	68	76.40
Reading newspapers	16	17.98
Consulting reference books	37	41.58
Using e-resources	53	59.55
Using reprographic services	29	32.58
Using Internet services	44	49.44
To get update themselves	22	24.72

**Multiple answers permitted*

The presented data in Table 4 highlights the various purposes of library visit of agricultural research fraternity of Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (UBKV), Pundibari, Cooch Behar, West Bengal (India). It was noticed by the researchers that 76.40% of the respondents visited the library for issue/return of books, and 59.55% respondents visit the library for accessing electronic information resources. Another side, 49.44% of the respondents visited the library for using Internet services provided by the library of the Institute, whereas, 41.58% respondents visit the library for consulting reference books, followed by using reprographic services (32.58%), to get update themselves (24.72%), and reading newspapers (17.98%) respectively. The analysis

shows that majority of the respondents visited the library either for issue/return of books or for accessing electronic resources/contents.

Table 5: Sources of information seeking

Sources*	Frequency (n =89)	Percentage
Open access resources available on Internet	64	71.92
E-journals/e-books	57	64.04
Print journals/books	48	53.94
Library catalogue	27	30.34
Magazines and newspapers	39	43.82
Discussion with librarian or reference librarian	30	33.70
Consult a knowledgeable person in the field	23	25.84

**Multiple answers permitted*

The data in Table 5 indicate the various sources of information seeking used by the agricultural research fraternity of UBKV. It was explored by the researchers that 71.92% of the respondents using the open access information resources available freely on Internet, whereas, more than sixty four percent respondents preferred to use e-journals and e-books for seeking their desired informational requirements. On the other hand, print journals and print books are being used by 53.94% of the respondents, while, magazines and newspapers are preferred to use by 43.82% respondents for their desired information, followed by library catalogue (30.34%). 33.70% of the respondents also said that sometime they get their desired information by discussion with librarian or reference librarian, while 25.84% respondents replied that they get their desired information by consulting a knowledgeable person in the field of their concerned.

Table 6: Purpose of information seeking

Purpose*	Frequency (n= 89)	Percentage
For research work	62	69.66
For writing articles	49	55.05
Collecting study material for writing books	14	15.73
For collecting study material to prepare class lecture	40	44.94
For academic and research assignments	27	30.34
For career development and growth	33	37.07
For updating core knowledge	20	22.47

**Multiple answers permitted*

The data in Table 6 illustrate the various purposes of information seeking of the agricultural research fraternity of UBKV. The data as depicted in above table shows that 69.66% of the

respondents seeking their desired information and related material from the library for research work as per their concerned field of specialization, while 55.05% respondents seeking information for writing articles. Another side, 44.94% of the respondents seeking desired information to collect the study material to prepare class lectures, whereas, 37.07% respondents seeking information for career development and growth, followed by for academic and research assignments (30.34%), for updating core knowledge (22.47%), and collecting study material for writing books (15.73%) respectively. It is found from the analysis that majority of the respondents seeking desired information from library particularly for research purpose and writing research articles.

Table 7: Barriers in information seeking

Barriers	Frequency (n= 89)	Percentage
Lack of time due to routine teaching, research and administrative load	65	73.03
Lack of awareness about the library resources and services	43	48.31
Lack of ICT knowledge for searching information effectively	28	31.46
Non-availability of latest print resources	30	33.70
Non-availability of latest electronic resources	22	24.72
Information overload on Internet	36	40.44
Poor library services	03	03.37
Lack of support from library staff	02	02.24

**Multiple answers permitted*

The presented data in Table 7 depicted the various barriers in information seeking faced by the agricultural research fraternity of Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (UBKV), Pundibari, Cooch Behar, West Bengal (India). It was found during the study that 73.03% of the respondents were facing the problem of lack of time due to routine teaching, research and administrative load, whereas, 48.31% respondents reported that lack of awareness about the library resources and services was the major barrier for them for seeking desired information. On the other hand, 40.44% of the respondents facing the problem of information overloaded on Internet, while 33.70% respondents facing the problem of non-availability of latest print resources in the library, followed by lack of ICT knowledge for searching information effectively (31.46%), non-availability of latest electronic resources (24.72%), poor library services (03.37%) and lack of support from library staff (02.24%) respectively for getting their desired information.

Table 8: Satisfaction from information resources and services

Satisfaction level*	Frequency / Percentage (n= 89)	
	Yes	No
Appropriate print and electronic information resources available in the library	35 (39.32%)	54 (60.68%)
Library staff support for information seeking	41 (46.06%)	48 (53.94%)
Efforts of sort out the information barriers by the library staff and authority	32 (35.96%)	57 (64.04%)
Good reprographic facility available in library for information support	50 (56.18%)	39 (43.82%)
Other users services provided by the library	63 (70.78%)	26 (29.22%)

**Multiple answers permitted*

The Table 8 presents the satisfaction among the respondents about the availability of information resources and services in library. It is clear from the data given in above table that 39.32% of the respondents were quiet satisfied with the appropriate print and electronic information resources available in the library, whereas, 46.06% of the respondents were satisfied with the support of library staff for information seeking. On the other hand, 35.96% of the respondents were satisfied with the fact that all the efforts of sort out the information barriers by the library staff and authority have been followed positively, while 56.18% respondents were satisfied with the good reprographic facility available in library for the information support of users, and maximum number of respondents (70.78%) were quiet satisfied with the various kind of users' services provided by the library. Overall, the respondents were moderately satisfied with the library facilities, resources and services.

10. Summary of major findings

Some of the major findings are summarizes as follows:

- About one third (32.58%) of the respondents visited the library once in a month, while only 20.22% respondents visited the library once in a week to get their desired information.
- 47.20% of the respondents spent less than one hour in the library premises for various purposes, while only 16.85% of the respondents spent 2-3 hours.
- More than 76% of the respondents visited the library for issue/return of books, while about 60% respondents visited the library for accessing electronic information resources.

- About 72% of the respondents were using open access information resources available freely on Internet, whereas, more than 64% respondents preferred to use e-journals and e-books for seeking their desired informational requirements.
- About 70% of the respondents were seeking their desired information and related material from the library for research work, while 55% respondents seeking information specially for writing articles.
- 73% of the respondents were facing the problem of lack of time due to routine teaching, research and administrative load, whereas, 48.31% respondents reported that lack of awareness about the library resources and services is the major barrier for them for seeking desired information.
- About 40% of the respondents were quiet satisfied with the appropriate print and electronic information resources available in the library, while 46% of the respondents were satisfied with the support of library staff for information seeking.

11. Suggestions and recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, some of the following relevant suggestions are made as given under:

- Books and journals in print as well as electronic form must be enhanced in the library up to the utmost satisfaction of agricultural research fraternity.
- Professional training programs must be scheduled for library staff so that they can enhance their skills and be able to satisfy the informational requirements of the research fraternity timely.
- Library staff must be motivated frequently so that they can work with full energy and positivity during the help of research fraternity.
- Awareness and training programs of library resources and services available in print and digital form must be organized frequently by the library authority for the agricultural research fraternity.
- The University authority must have to provide all the possible resources to the library so that the library can enhance its resources and services and be always ready to serve the users' community in positive ways with utmost satisfaction level.

12. Conclusion

The information need of any person/user arise when he/she feels that the particular portion of information will be useful to them and able to resolve the issue or eagerness or requirement of information. In this present era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), information may be available in variety of forms. The study investigated the information seeking behaviour of agricultural research fraternity at Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (UBKV), Pundibari, Cooch Behar, West Bengal (India). The findings revealed that Majority of the respondents were preferred to access open access information resources, which are freely available on Internet, and even furthermore preferred to use e-journals and e-books for seeking their desired informational needs. It is also explored that more than two third of the respondents were seeking information for research work particularly for writing articles. It is also evident from the study that the respondents were facing some common problems, which much be address accordingly by the University/Library authority so that the information needs of agricultural research fraternity are fulfilled with utmost satisfaction. This study will be useful to the concerned library staff and university authority to update the facilities, resources and services in the library up to the ultimate satisfaction of the users' community. Further, this study will be useful to the library professionals to conduct similar type of other studies in other areas to get the feedback from the other users' groups regarding satisfaction towards the library resources and services.

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